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ABSTRACT

This is a study of high school students' attitudes and interest toward five areas of social studies: economics, geography, government, history, and psychology/sociology. Two thousand ninety-two high school seniors in 18 high schools in northwestern Georgia completed a survey form and indicated the social studies areas they liked best and least. The largest number of students (39%) rated history as the most-liked course. The authors believe that this is due to the fact that the majority of social studies teachers in northwestern Georgia have majored in history and therefore have greater confidence, security, and enthusiasm in teaching this area. It is interesting to note, however, that 21% of the students selected history as the least-liked subject. The behavioral science area of psychology/sociology was the second most-liked area. Because of the "now and here" orientation of this area, students saw it as very relevant to their lives. The lowest number of students (12%) rated psychology/sociology as being the least-liked area. Students seemed to be somewhat neutral toward the areas of government and economics. Geography was the social studies area that most students liked least. (Author/RM)

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DIFFERENCES IN STUDENTS' INTEREST TOWARD FIVE AREAS OF THE SOCIAL STUDIES

J. Hugh McTeer

INTRODUCTION

As school personnel plan the curriculum of a school's program, many factors affecting the curriculum must be considered. One of the more important factors affecting curriculum making decisions is the interest students have in the various elements of the curriculum. Very little hard research has been completed to determine student interest in this area. Especially has this been true in the social studies with their various areas of study. In an early study, Witty (1961) found that high school students expressed a greater interest in those areas of study where they received the highest grades. A number of studies have related the student's sex to interest in the social studies. McTeer, Blanton, and Lee (1975) and McTeer (1975) report on studies that indicate boys expressed a higher interest in social studies than did girls when the social studies were compared with the academic areas of English, mathematics, and science. In another study, McTeer and Beasley (1977) reported that junior high boys preferred military and political history more than did junior high girls and senior high girls preferred cultural history more than did senior high boys. They also found that girls expressed a greater interest in cultural geography than did boys, and senior high girls expressed a greater liking for sociology than did senior high boys. Another finding reported was that junior high boys preferred government to a greater degree than did junior high girls.

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However little study has been reported as to student interest or lack of interest in the various areas of the social studies. McTeer (1977 A) did report

findings that indicated that students preferred the culturally oriented areas of the social studies to a greater degree than they did the non-culturally oriented areas, i.e., students preferred social geography over physical geography and social history over military and political history. This research study indicated that students expressed a low interest in the social studies area of economics. However, in another study McTeer (1977) reported that high school students, in selected Georgia schools, saw economics more favorable as an area of study than they did geography and government but less favorably than they did history and psychology/sociology. This study also reported that there were great differences among students of different schools as to the students' views being favorable or unfavorable toward economics.

Because of the dearth of research studies which give information concerning students' attitude and interest toward the various areas of the social studies, a study was conducted among high school seniors in certain high schools in the northwestern area of Georgia to give some information in this area.

RESEARCH PROCEDURES

To determine the interest of high school students in various areas of the social studies (economics, geography, government, history, and psychology/sociology), a survey was conducted in certain high schools in the northwestern section of Georgia. These high schools were located in that area of Georgia just south of Chattanooga, Tennessee, extending to, and including, the metropolitan area of Atlanta. The high schools selected for this study were schools where their senior students would have had some exposure to all five of the social studies areas. Two thousand and ninety-two high school seniors in eighteen high schools completed the forms for the survey. A brief description of the high schools used is given in Table I.

TABLE I

Brief Description of High Schools

School	Type School	Approximate Enrollment
A	Comprehensive high school (9 - 12) on fringe of metropolitan Atlanta. Students are both rural and suburban.	1,700
B	High school (9 - 12) in suburban Atlanta. Students largely lower-middle class.	1,800
C	High school (9 - 12) in small industrial city.	800
D	High school (9 - 12) in south side of metropolitan Atlanta.	900
E	High school (9 - 12) in small industrial city. Rural students also attend the school.	800
F	High school (9 - 12) in medium size city. Students are largely lower class and lower-middle class.	800
G	High school (8 - 12) in small town on fringe of Atlanta.	650
H	Comprehensive high school (9 - 12) in small city. Both city and rural students attend.	1,300
I	Comprehensive high school (9 - 12) in rural northwestern area of Georgia.	1,000
J	Small city high school (10 - 12).	1,050
K	High school (8 - 12) on fringe of metropolitan Atlanta. Both rural and suburban students attend.	900
L	Small high school (8 - 12) in small town.	400
M	High school (8 - 12) in suburban metropolitan Atlanta.	1,250
N	High school (9 - 12) in suburban Atlanta. Students are largely upper-middle class.	1,700
O	Private high school (9 - 12) in metropolitan Atlanta. Select student body from upper-middle and upper classes.	1,100
P	Comprehensive high school (0 - 12). Students from small town and rural area.	1,650

In these selected schools, high school seniors were asked to complete a simple form which asked them to select the social studies area from economics, geography, government, history and psychology/sociology which they liked best and the area they liked least. Information concerning the 2,092 students selecting each area of the social studies as the most liked area and the least liked area is given in Table II.

TABLE II

Number of Students Who Selected
Each Social Studies Area As
Most Liked and As Least Liked

School	Social Studies Area									
	Economics		Geography		Government		History		Psychology/ Sociology	
	ML*	LL**	ML	LL	ML	LL	ML	LL	ML	LL
A	4	12	2	36	12	22	38	11	36	11
B	76	18	15	47	36	123	96	34	39	40
C	38	52	2	26	33	17	46	36	14	2
D	10	24	7	22	3	11	40	5	11	9
E	42	13	10	17	10	30	31	27	6	12
F	5	12	4	14	9	15	28	9	19	15
G	6	20	6	12	0	6	36	7	6	9
H	17	13	39	64	45	33	47	63	47	22
I	3	9	2	8	2	12	26	7	11	8
J	6	34	5	28	25	59	84	36	51	14
K	9	11	2	18	2	5	37	9	3	10
L	5	7	5	15	1	17	29	13	15	3
M	22	25	4	19	23	13	35	17	7	17
N	7	32	16	115	85	70	90	89	139	31
O	7	24	20	52	11	33	81	46	61	25
P	13	20	12	58	24	56	73	33	68	23
TOTALS	270	326	151	551	321	522	817	442	533	251

* Most Liked

** Least Liked

Further study was done in order to determine the relative ranking of the social studies areas made by these students. The area of the social studies having the greatest number of students selecting it as most liked was given a one, the second greatest number was given a two, while a five represented the area having the least number of students selecting this area. A reverse order was done for students selecting the area as the least liked, i.e., a one represented the fewest students which least liked the area and a five represented the greatest number of students who least liked the area. Table III gives this information.

TABLE III

RANK ORDERING OF THE SOCIAL STUDIES AREAS

Social Studies Areas

Economics		Geography		Government		History		Psychology/ Sociology	
ML*	LL**	ML	LL	ML	LL	ML	LL	ML	LL
4	4	5	5	3	2	1	3	2	1

* Most Liked

** Least Liked

A percentage was also computed for the total number of students who selected each area as the most liked and also the least liked. Table IV gives this information.

TABLE IV

Percentage of Students Selecting
Each Area of the Social Studies
As Most Liked and As Least Liked

Social Studies Areas

Economics		Geography		Government		History		Psychology/ Sociology	
ML*	LL**	ML	LL	ML	LL	ML	LL	ML	LL
12.9	15.5	7.3	26.3	15.4	24.9	39.0	21.1	25.4	11.9

* Most Liked

** Least Liked

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

Conclusions

From the information given in Table II, Table III, and Table IV, the following conclusions may be drawn:

1. More students selected history as being the most liked course. Of the total students responding, the 817 students selecting history as the most liked area represented 39.1% of the total number. However, it is interesting that 21.1% of the students selected history as being the least liked subject.
2. The behavioral science area of psychology/sociology can be considered the second most liked area. Although it ranked lower than history, with only 25.9% of the students rating it most liked, the fewest number of students (12.0%) rated it as being the least liked area.

3. Students seem to be somewhat neutral toward the areas of government and economics. They see these areas as being neither the most liked or the least liked areas of the social studies.
4. Geography was seen as the social studies area that students liked least. More students (26.8%) rated it as the least liked area and fewer students (7.2%) rated it as the most liked area of the social studies.

Discussion

Although high school students frequently make the remark that history is not relevant because it is a study of the past, it is seen that a large plurality (39.1%) of the students selected history as their most liked social studies area. At the same time history ranked next to the top of the social studies areas that is least liked. Although there are no data in this study to support the following conclusions for this finding, a large majority of the social studies teachers in the northwestern area of Georgia have an undergraduate and graduate concentration in history. With an indepth knowledge of history, these teachers probably feel a greater confidence and security in teaching this area of the social studies. This would result in a greater enthusiasm in their teaching and the use of a variety of teaching techniques which probably would create student interest in the area of history. Even though a large number of students expressed a liking for history, there is also the fact that a relatively large number expressed a lesser liking for history than any of the other areas of the social studies. This possibly could be accounted for by the fact that the present high school population is concerned with the present more than with the past and see history as having little relevance to their present life.

The area of psychology/sociology is probably more "now and here" oriented than any of the other social studies areas. The students probably see this area as more relevant to their present life than any other area. This may be why the area is seen quite favorably by students. In talking with certain high school students, but not enough to give any final credibility, the students expressed their idea that psychology/sociology was less academically demanding than the other social studies areas. For whatever the reason, it may be seen that students certainly view this area of the social studies in a favorable light.

Georgraphy was selected as the area of the social studies that was least liked by high school students. Certain students, but not a statistically sound sampling, were asked why they did not like this area. Their reply was that geography was taught with a great amount of rote memorization of place names, imports, exports, etc. They expressed dislike for this type of teaching. In the northwestern area of Georgia, few social studies teachers have an undergraduate or graduate concentration in geography. With teachers who have little indepth knowledge of a subject area, it is probably difficult for these teachers to exhibit enthusiasm for their teaching and to vary their teaching strategies. Frequently these teachers must slavishly follow the textbook materials. If more social studies teachers had a greater knowledge of geography, possibly their teaching techniques would change and this might result in a greater student interest and like for geography.

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